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COMMISSION GOVERNMENT IN THE SOUTH

BY WILLIAM O. SCROGGS,

Associate Professor of Economics and History, Louisiana State University,
Baton Rouge, La.

While the credit for inaugurating the commission form of municipal government that is now spreading so rapidly in all parts of the United States is rightly attributed to Galveston, the system so successfully operated by that municipality since 1901 was by no means a complete innovation. Certain analogies between this form of government and that of the New England towns and of the District of Columbia have been frequently pointed out; but there are other experiments in municipal government which bear a still closer resemblance to the one initiated ten years ago by the Texas city on the gulf.

The three lawyers who originated the commission government for Galveston seem to have been quite unaware that they were following precedents established by other southern cities a generation earlier.¹ The work of these men was the product of their own minds, but their creation was not novel. Without knowing it, they had almost duplicated the charter adopted for the city of New Orleans in 1870. The earlier experiments, like that of Galveston, were the results of crises. Under such conditions the need of centralized, responsible administration was keenly felt; and the outcome, in the seventies as well as at the beginning of the twentieth century, was what is now called city government by commission.

The decade following the Civil War was one of general commercial and industrial depression in the South, and its cities fell on especially hard lines. By 1869 the condition of the government of New Orleans was truly deplorable. It could not pay the interest on its debt or meet its current expenses, and it had issued a currency of doubtful legal validity, which was circulated in such large amounts as to make it worthless. In his message to the legislature this year Governor Warmoth declared that the city administration,

¹ See President Charles W. Elliot's address on *Better Municipal Government* before the Good Government Club of Williams College. Reprinted in Beard's *Digest of Short Ballot Charters*, p. 21101.

then bicameral, was "cumbersome, expensive, and irresponsible," and urged that a new charter should be granted containing definite powers and attaching more responsibility to the officials. A plan submitted by the "Property Holders' Association" of New Orleans was introduced in the State Senate and debated at length, but no definite action was taken before adjournment. The principal objection to the measure was its concentration of authority in too small a number of officials.

At the next session, in 1870, the agitation for reform was renewed, and this time it met with success. The new charter vested the legislative and administrative powers of the city in a mayor and seven administrators. Many provisions of this instrument are strikingly like those now found in the city charters modeled after the Galveston plan. It should be noted also that this government by commission antedates by four years the appointment of a commission by Congress for the government of the District of Columbia, and precedes by eight years the creation of a permanent commission for the District. The first mayor and administrators of New Orleans were to be appointed by the governor, but were to hold office only until an election could be held some months later. The administrators were collectively termed the council, and were chosen from the city at large. Their term of office was two years, three members and the mayor being chosen in one year and the other four members in the next, so that not more than half of the personnel of the council should change at one time. The executive business of the city was divided into the seven departments of finance, commerce, improvements, assessments, police, public accounts, and waterworks and public buildings; and an administrator was placed in charge of each department. Each administrator recommended the clerks and other officers for his department, and these were appointed and their salaries fixed by the council, which also had the power to remove any of these officials at its discretion. The administrators received an annual salary of \$6,000, and were required to submit monthly departmental reports and to keep their offices in the city hall open seven hours a day.

It became customary for the council to meet informally on the day before the regular weekly assembly and discuss with any of their townsmen who cared to be present the matters that would be presented for formal action on the following day. The newspapers

always gave full accounts of these meetings, and the public could thus have full information of the conduct of the city's business. When matters of particular importance were to be discussed prominent citizens received special invitations to attend. Upon a measure relating to sewerage, discussion was carried on in this manner for more than a year, and every citizen who so desired had a chance to express his views. As to the success of the plan there is a radical difference of opinion. Judge William W. Howe, in his "Municipal History of New Orleans," states that the administrators were generally men of prominence in business or politics, and were more amenable to public opinion than the usual alderman or councilman of American cities. The twelve years of rule by the administrators, he says, were a period of progressive and business-like government, far superior to the bicameral system that preceded it. On the other hand, it has been claimed that the administrators developed a gigantic political machine and enjoyed unrestricted powers of graft. It is certain that the system evoked criticism on account of the smallness of the council and its alleged liability to private and corporate control. Its opponents tried to arouse public hostility to its highly centralized powers and after 1879 began active agitation for a change. In 1882 their efforts were successful, and the city went back to the usual American plan of councilmen chosen by wards. If this system had been tried at a time when civic interest was at a higher ebb, the credit of originating the commission plan of government might now be claimed by New Orleans rather than by Galveston.

Just as New Orleans was preparing to discard her government by administrators, the neighboring city of Mobile was encountering difficulties. Public aid to railways in the reconstruction period, and the panic of 1873 had brought that municipality to bankruptcy, and the property of its citizens was liable to sale for taxes assessed under a writ of mandamus of the Federal court. After two years of solicitation, the state legislature was prevailed upon to come to the city's relief, and by an act of February 11, 1879, it annulled the charter, declared the corporation abolished, ordered all its assets to be applied to the liquidation of its debts, and placed these assets under the control of three commissioners appointed by the governor. These commissioners were authorized to discharge their duties under the direction of the court of chancery; to adjust, compound,

and compromise all debts and demands, including taxes past due; to report the results of their work to the governor, and to draft a legislative bill to effect the settlement they deemed advisable. A second act of the same date incorporated the Port of Mobile, to take the place of the defunct city. To secure economy, simplicity, and efficiency, the "Port" was to be governed by eight commissioners, chosen by wards, and styled the Mobile police board. They were charged only with the duties of preserving the peace, protecting the health, taking care of the streets, and providing against fires; and were empowered to pass laws and ordinances and to levy taxes for the attainment of these ends. We have here a form of dual commission government, an appointive commission of three with plenary power to deal with the municipal debt, and an elective commission of eight with both legislative and administrative functions, limited, however, to the exercise of police powers. By the end of 1880, the debt commissioners had succeeded in negotiating a plan of adjustment with the creditors of the "late city," which was approved by the legislature. The "Port of Mobile," however, continued its corporate existence, with its government by commissioners, until 1887, when a city government after the usual pattern was again established. In 1882 the Alabama legislature was called upon to repeat for the city of Selma practically what it had done for Mobile.

In the same year in which legislative relief was secured for Mobile, the legislature of Tennessee took similar action with regard to the city of Memphis. Successive epidemics of yellow fever had impoverished and greatly depopulated the city, the public debt amounted to nearly one-third of the value of the taxable property, and the population had declined in the last decade from forty thousand to about thirty-three thousand. In January, 1879, the legislature repealed the city charter, creating out of the municipality the "taxing district of Shelby County," and vesting the government in a board of public works of five members and a governing council of three. The council managed the affairs of the "taxing district" until 1891 and greatly improved the sanitary condition, securing a new water supply and repaving the streets. Prosperity returned, and the population in the decade 1880-90 almost doubled.

The first period of city government by commission in the South thus ran its course in about two decades. The system, except in the case of New Orleans, was regarded as merely temporary, and

was abandoned as soon as the emergency which called it forth had passed. The second and more important period of commission government in the South was likewise called forth by an emergency, and the plan at the time of its installation was also regarded as temporary. On September 8, 1900, a terrible West Indian hurricane sent high waves over the low island on which the city of Galveston is situated, causing a loss of 5,000 lives and of property valued at \$17,000,000. The government of the city, for a long time notoriously incompetent and even dishonest, showed its utter helplessness in the crisis following the storm. Even before the disaster the city's credit had been reduced to zero, and its current expenses were being paid in scrip which circulated at a big discount. What could be expected of the old regime when pavements, electric-lighting plant, waterworks, fire-engine stations and all other public buildings were either greatly damaged or in ruins, and a large portion of the taxable property had been swept into the sea? While the government was for the time being practically in the hands of the Deepwater Commission, an organization of business men formed previously to promote harbor improvements, three Galveston lawyers, meeting every evening after a day of relief work, undertook to draw up a new frame of government for their stricken municipality. In two months they had devised a charter, and after securing the co-operation of a large number of citizens, they succeeded in obtaining favorable action by the legislature on April 18, 1901. The framers of the charter seem to have studied somewhat the governmental conditions and experiences of Boston, St. Louis, and New York, but their plan was not noticeably influenced by what they learned of these cities. As already stated, their work was entirely original; and yet, so prone is the human mind always to act the same way under similar conditions, that the Galveston charter reproduced many of the salient features of the New Orleans charter of 1870. The new administration was inaugurated in September, 1901, and this was the beginning of the second period of commission government in the south. The charter vested the entire legislative and executive functions in five commissioners, three appointed by the governor and two chosen by the citizens. The constitutionality of this provision, however, was soon contested, and the State Supreme Court held that certain powers which had been vested in the commissioners could be exercised only by elective

officers. This decision necessitated an amendment making all the commissioners elective, which was secured by an act of March 30, 1903. The change was undoubtedly of great influence in establishing the permanency of commission government in the city. The benefits from the new government became at once apparent. Under the aldermanic system, the city had incurred an annual deficit for several years of \$100,000, the funding of which into bonded debt had been regularly authorized by the legislature. When the commission government went into operation, there was a floating debt of over \$200,000. In 1910 this had been paid, \$475,000 of the old bonded debt had been retired, and over \$600,000 from current revenues had been expended for constructing shell roads and drains. Schools were built, the water-plant improved, the sewer system extended, the streets cleaned and repaved, the running expenses greatly reduced, and the credit of the city raised from nothing to above par.

The success of the Galveston experiment at once began to attract attention in the neighboring city of Houston, which had also been suffering for a long time from the evils of the aldermanic system. In the language of Mayor Rice, "Debt after debt was being created and nothing to show for the moneys paid into the treasury. The people of Houston were in that frame of mind to accept any form or kind of change in their government, knowing full well that they could do nothing worse than to continue what they had." On December 10, 1904, the commission plan was submitted to a vote of the people and secured a good majority, although the total vote was light. The new charter was granted by the legislature on March 18, 1905, and the commission government was put into operation on July 5 following.

The Houston charter is different in certain minor respects from that of Galveston. In Houston the five elective officials are styled the mayor and aldermen, and are collectively designated as the city council. They receive larger salaries than the Galveston officials and are required to devote their entire time to the city. The five officials of Galveston are known as the mayor-president and commissioners, and are collectively styled the board of commissioners. In both cities these officials are chosen from the city at large.

The new government of Houston proved a success from the start. At the time of its inauguration there was a floating debt of

over \$400,000; at the end of the first year this had been redeemed, nearly \$100,000 in delinquent taxes had been collected, and all current expenses had been met. At the end of five years \$1,865,757 had been spent for improvements out of current revenues, while the tax rate at the same time had been reduced thirty cents on the hundred dollars. In 1906 the city purchased the privately owned water-works system, began to furnish better water, and finally succeeded in reducing the water-rate from fifty to fifteen cents per thousand gallons. At the same time bucket-shops, poolrooms, gambling houses, and objectionable variety theatres were closed, and saloon keepers were made to comply with the closing law.

The good results obtained from the commission plan in Galveston and Houston gave a great impetus to its adoption in other towns of the state, and the system began to attract attention in all parts of the Union. In 1907 five other Texas cities adopted commission government, and two Iowa cities—Des Moines and Davenport—did likewise. It is worthy of note that of these seven cities five added new features by making provision in their charters for one or more of the three voting methods known as the initiative, the referendum, and the recall. In adopting this innovation, Fort Worth took the lead, receiving a charter, on February 26, providing for the referendum and recall. A few weeks later, on April 13, Dallas went a step further, by securing a charter providing for the initiative as well as the two other features. Denison in the same month adopted the plan with provision for the recall and for a limited referendum on franchises. The form of commission government that includes the initiative, referendum, and recall, and a provision for non-partisan primaries is known as the "Des Moines plan," but the Iowa city does not deserve the entire credit for this modification of the Galveston plan. Many features of the so-called "Des Moines plan" were being developed for Fort Worth and Dallas simultaneously with their consideration by the Iowa legislature.

The two other Texas cities to set the commission form of government in operation in 1907 were Beaumont and Greenville.² The latter, having a population of only about 8,000, was the first of the smaller cities to try the experiment, and its charter, as

² Memphis also obtained a charter for such a government this year, but it was nullified by a judicial decision, as will be explained below.

well as that of Denison, provides for only three commissioners, including the mayor. An interesting feature of the Greenville and Dallas charters is the provision that the office of city treasurer shall be let to the "highest and best bidder." The Beaumont plan differs materially from that of its sister cities. Some of its citizens, indeed, deny that it really has the commission form of government. Six commissioners and the mayor are chosen by the voters at large, but two commissioners must be chosen from each ward—a compromise between the old ward system and the election method in nearly all other commission cities. The Beaumont commissioners have the powers of the former city council and in addition the power to appoint all the administrative officers upon the recommendation of the mayor. The city thus retains some features of the aldermanic system, but it has secured the advantages of more centralized responsibility and of a shorter ballot, as only seven officials are elective.

From the foregoing it will be seen that at the end of the year 1907 nine cities were under the commission form of government, and of these seven were in the South. Three and a half years later the number of cities and towns in which this form of government was either already in operation, or had been provided for by special charter or by an election under a general law, was one hundred and forty-four. Thirty-three of these are in the South, and their distribution, according to the official publication of the Short Ballot Organization, is as follows: Alabama, 4; Kentucky, 1; Louisiana, 1; Mississippi, 2; North Carolina, 3; South Carolina, 1; Tennessee, 2; Texas, 16; and West Virginia, 3. In the states of Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, and Virginia commission government has not yet made its appearance, but an earnest effort is being made to secure a modified form of commission government for the city of Atlanta.

Both in the number and in the importance of its commission-governed municipalities, Texas has always held the first place among the southern states. Its sixteen commission governments are to be found in places ranging in size from towns of less than two thousand inhabitants to the three leading cities of Dallas (92,102), Fort Worth (73,302), and Houston (78,800). The more important of these cities obtained their charters by special legislative enactments, but since March 25, 1909, a general law has been in force allowing cities of less than ten thousand population, whether incor-

porated or unincorporated, to adopt this form of government by popular vote. Aransas Pass, Kennedy, Marble Falls, and Port Lavaca are among the small towns that have availed themselves of this act.

Until 1908 commission government in the South was confined to Texas. In that year, however, Mississippi passed a "Home Rule Law," approved March 31, which gave all its cities the privilege of coming under this new system of government, and the cities of Hattiesburg and Clarksdale subsequently took advantage of the act. By its terms ten per cent of the voters of a municipality, upon signing a petition for this government and stipulating therein the number of commissioners to be chosen, the time each must devote to his public duties, the salaries to be paid, etc., may secure a popular vote upon the proposed measure. If the vote is favorable, the governor is authorized to issue a charter complying with the terms of the petition. These terms are amendable at any subsequent time by a local election.

In 1909 the idea began to spread more rapidly in the South, and the plan was put into operation in North Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia. The town of High Point, North Carolina, was the first to adopt commission government in that year, receiving its charter on February 27. In providing for nine commissioners, High Point broke all records for numbers, and this is especially noteworthy, since the smaller cities have usually shown a tendency to reduce the number from five to three or four. The method of choosing the commissioners is the same as that described in the case of Beaumont, but unlike the council of the latter city that of High Point has the power both "to make and to enforce such rules and regulations" as it may deem proper for the administration of the city's affairs. The councilmen receive two dollars for each meeting attended, and the meetings are limited to two per month. Greensboro and Wilmington are the two other cities of this state that have adopted government by commission. The charter of the latter, obtained March 3, 1911, provides that no two of the commissioners shall be from the same ward, and that the commissioner receiving the highest vote shall be designated as mayor. There is also provision for the initiative, referendum, and recall and for non-partisan primaries, as in the Des Moines plan.

Several new features in the government of southern cities were

inaugurated in 1909 in the charters of Huntington and Bluefield, West Virginia. In Huntington, in addition to the board of four commissioners, there is a Citizens' Board of sixty-four persons, sixteen being chosen by the voters in each of the four wards. The Citizens' Board has the power of the referendum and the recall. It meets regularly once a month, and oftener if necessary, and has the right to veto, by a majority vote, any ordinance or franchise passed by the board of commissioners. In the case of an ordinance levying a special tax, a vote of only two-fifths of the Board against the measure is sufficient to veto it. The Board is also empowered to hear charges against any commissioner and may remove him by a two-thirds' vote. The charter declares that its object "is to procure an honest and efficient administration of the affairs of the city of Huntington, free from partisan distinction and control." With this end in view it provides that, of the four commissioners to be chosen at an election, not more than two shall be of the same political party, "and if more than two candidates of the same political party receive the greatest number of votes, then the two of such party receiving the greatest number of votes shall be declared elected," and the votes of the other candidates of that party shall be disregarded; while the two candidates of other political parties receiving the next greatest vote shall be declared elected. In like manner, of the sixteen members of the Citizens' Board to be chosen from each ward, not more than eight may be of the same political party. The candidate for commissioner receiving the highest vote becomes *ipso facto* mayor of the city.

The government of Bluefield, West Virginia, is similar to that of Huntington, but there are certain differences between the two that are worth mentioning. In place of a Citizens' Board, Bluefield has a council, chosen by wards, and possessing not only the right of veto and removal, but also the right to make recommendations on any matter relating to the city government. Not more than half its members may be of the same political faith. The legislative and administrative functions are vested in four men, including the mayor, termed collectively the Board of Affairs.

While these special features of the two West Virginia cities are interesting to the student of municipal government, they can hardly obtain his unqualified approval. The two chief advantages of the commission government are its simplicity and its centralized

responsibility. The large and cumbrous Citizens' Board of Huntington tends to destroy both. Furthermore, the Board, instead of being non-partisan tends to become merely bi-partisan; and a citizen's fitness to serve thereon is dependent, in part, upon his attitude toward national politics. The same criticism applies to the Bluefield Council. Parkersburg, which obtained a charter in February, 1911, did not follow the example of the two other West Virginia municipalities, but secured a government modeled closely after the Des Moines plan.

The experience of Memphis with commission government from 1879 to 1891 has already been referred to. In 1907 this city secured a new charter modeled closely after that of Houston, but the Supreme Court of Tennessee declared the instrument null and void, on the ground that it would remove the existing elective officials from their positions before the expiration of their terms. Nothing daunted, however, the advocates of commission government went to work and secured a new charter in April, 1909, with the objectionable features eliminated, and on January 1, 1910, Memphis was for a second time under a government by commission. On February 9, 1911, Chattanooga followed the example of Memphis, but secured a charter of the Des Moines type. A special feature in Chattanooga is the abolition of the old board of school commissioners and the placing of the public schools under the direct control of the city commissioners.

In 1910 three states—South Carolina, Kentucky, and Louisiana—passed general laws allowing certain classes of cities to vote upon the question of adopting a prescribed form of commission government. In this movement South Carolina took the lead, passing an act, approved February 21, applicable to all cities with from 20,000 to 50,000 population. The government is vested in a council of five, including the mayor, and provision is made for the referendum and recall, and for a civil service commission. Columbia at once took advantage of the provisions of this act and inaugurated its new government on May 12. In its election there were only sixty-eight votes against the proposed change. A month later, Kentucky followed South Carolina with an act applicable to cities of the second class (20,000 to 100,000 population). The law differs from that of South Carolina mainly in the absence of any provision for a civil service commission and the recall. Only four cities were affected

by the Kentucky statute: Lexington, Newport, Covington, and Paducah. As yet the question has been submitted only to the voters of Lexington and of Newport. In the former city, the proposal was rejected by a majority of about 800, but in Newport it was carried by a good majority, and the Court of Appeals in a test case from this city upheld the constitutionality of the statute. The Newport government will be put into operation on January 1, 1912.

Louisiana³ fell in line on July 7, 1910, with an act permitting all cities of over 7,500 population to adopt the commission plan by popular vote. From the provisions of this law, however, New Orleans, Monroe, Baton Rouge, and Lake Charles were expressly excluded in the title and the text of the bill, the legislature, for some reason, being of the opinion that these cities should not be allowed to decide the question for themselves. The law provides for three commissioners in all places of less than 25,000 inhabitants and for five in all larger places. A scale of salaries is provided, varying with the size of the municipality. Provision is made for the initiative, referendum, and recall. The city of Shreveport (pop. 28,015) immediately availed itself of the privileges of this act, and inaugurated its commission government on November 14. Its chief motive in making a change was the desire to enforce more strictly the local prohibition laws. Under the old form of government, this had proved impossible.

The further progress of the commission idea was indicated in 1911 by its appearance in Alabama. On March 31, the legislature created a commission form of government for all cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants (meaning Birmingham), with the stipulation that the new government should be put into operation within thirty days without further reference of the question to the voters. For a city of this size (pop. 132,685), the government is highly centralized, there being only three commissioners, including the mayor. The term of one commissioner expires each year. By the terms of the act the mayor of the city at the time of the installation of the new government became *ex officio* president of the board of commissioners. The other commissioners were appointed by the governor, but at the expiration of their terms these three officials become henceforth elective. The commissioners are subject to the recall, and all their books and accounts and those of the subordinate

³ See also *Commission Government in the West*, *infra*.—EDITOR.

officials are subject, at any time, to examination by the state examiner of public accounts upon the order of the governor. The installation of the commission government in Birmingham is of especial importance, inasmuch as it is the largest city in the South and the second largest city in the United States to take this step. Its experience will help to settle the much discussed question as to the adaptability of commission government to cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants.

Six days after the Birmingham measure became law, a similar enactment went into effect providing commission government for cities of class "C" (25,000 to 50,000 population), also without reference to the electorate. Montgomery, whose voters had already assented to the change of government, was the only city affected by this law, and a board of five commissioners was duly installed on April 10, only four days after the signing of the act. As in the case of Birmingham, the mayor under the old charter became *ex officio* president of the board of commissioners, and the four other members were appointed by the governor, to hold the office until 1915, when the positions become elective. The law provides the city with non-partisan primaries, and with the referendum and the recall. All vacancies on the board of commissioners are filled by the governor.

On April 8 the Alabama legislature passed still a third act, making it possible for any city not within the scope of the previous laws to adopt the commission form of government by a popular vote. The measure provides for three commissioners with salaries varying according to the size of the municipality; the mayor under the old charter becomes a commissioner for a limited time, but the two others are in all cases elective. The recall and a referendum limited to franchises are provided for. As in the case of Birmingham, the governor may order an official examination of the city's books at any time. The most interesting feature of this law is the provision for the preferential ballot, a measure first adopted in Grand Junction, Colorado, in 1909. Alabama is the first southern state to adopt this new feature of municipal government. Each voter is permitted to indicate on the ballot his first and second choice for the office to be filled. The candidate receiving a majority of "first choice" votes is elected, but if no one receives such a majority the first and second choice votes for each candidate are added

together, and the one receiving a majority of the combined votes is elected. If in this event no candidate has received a majority, a second election must be held, only the two candidates receiving the highest combined vote in the previous election being eligible. A fourth act, approved April 21, prescribed a form of commission government, to be adopted by popular vote, for cities of class "D" (1,000 to 25,000 population). In June, 1911, the cities of Mobile and Huntsville took advantage of the new laws and adopted the commission form of government by majorities of about two to one. Mobile had long suffered from the effects of boss rule, and the change was strenuously resisted by the local politicians. After the election a committee of thirty citizens was appointed, under the auspices of the Commission Government Association, to devise a method of indorsing two candidates for nomination as commissioners, and it recommended that the friends of the commission government should express their choice by a "straw ballot" printed in the daily papers, and that they should support the men securing the largest "straw" vote. At the election on August 7, the "straw ballot" nominees won over their opponents, who were supported by those unfriendly to the change, by a majority of five to one. In this election the preferential ballot was employed in the south for the first time. The aldermanic government expired at the end of August, and Mobile, like Memphis, became a second time a commission-governed city. Commission government, though relatively late in making its appearance in Alabama, advanced there with wonderful rapidity in a few months, and this state bids fair soon to rival Texas in the number and importance of cities under the new plan.

In addition to the cities whose governments have been described, there are several others which are often incorrectly classified as commission-governed, but whose governments nevertheless show certain deviations from the general aldermanic system. El Paso, for example, has a mayor, four aldermen, and four other elective officers, the remaining officials being appointive. Charlotte, North Carolina, has a board of twenty-one aldermen who have entire control of municipal affairs by their power of appointing the various administrative boards. Waco, Texas, is sometimes included in the list of cities governed by commission, mainly, it seems, because its charter provides for the initiative, referendum and recall.

In 1908 the city council of Staunton, Virginia (pop. 10,604), undertook a very interesting experiment by placing the entire government of the city in the hands of a general manager, with duties like those of the general manager of any corporation. He buys supplies, supervises improvements, and is said to have saved his entire salary the first year in the careful purchase and economical consumption of coal alone. None of these municipalities has a commission government in the proper sense of the term.

After this sketch of the development of commission government in the southern states, the question of the results of the movement naturally arises. How far has the new plan succeeded in remedying the patent defects in the governments which it has supplanted? The answer to this question should be prefaced by a statement of what the plan has not done. In the first place, it has not entirely removed small politics from municipal government; but it has simplified city politics and thus destroyed much of the subtle influence of local politicians. In the second place, it has not greatly changed the personnel of the city officials. In many southern cities a number of the commissioners were office-holders under the aldermanic regime. These men, however, are now in a different situation with regard to the public. The commissioners are few in number and are therefore well-known to the citizen body; they have definite duties, and the average man knows what they are. If things go wrong, they cannot shift the blame to other shoulders. In Birmingham, shortly after the commission government went into operation, several citizens complained to the chief of police that there were a number of places in the city in which young boys were being systematically instructed in various forms of gambling. When that official refused to take action, an appeal was made directly to the commissioner having jurisdiction over the matter, and the places were closed at once. Who would have looked for such a result if the appeal had been made to a ward alderman?

It is from the financial side, however, that the success of city government by commission is most easily determined. As examples of the increased economy resulting from the change in administration, the cases of Galveston and Houston have already been cited. The experience of Austin, Texas, has been somewhat similar. In two years its commissioners paid off overdrafts amounting to \$31,529, redeemed \$29,000 of its bonds, reduced the tax rate twenty-

four cents on the hundred dollars, and at the end of the year had on hand a surplus of \$93,432. When Columbia, South Carolina, inaugurated its new government it faced a deficit of \$80,000; in February, 1911, after eight months of commission administration, there was a cash balance in the treasury of \$19,000, and there were prospects of a lower tax rate and of increased expenditures for public improvements during the current year. In Birmingham, after four months' trial, it was estimated that the change in government would save the city about one hundred thousand dollars annually. In Dallas, Texas, the commissioners in two years wiped out a deficit of \$200,000 and placed a balance in the treasury. Here the citizens were so thoroughly convinced that they were getting value received for every dollar spent that they voted a higher tax rate and thus increased expenditures while reducing the expensiveness of their government.

The ink is still too fresh on the charters of most of the southern cities which have commission government to permit the forming of any opinion as to the final success of the plan. But wherever the new system has received a thorough trial, it has given the citizens general satisfaction and they manifest no desire to re-establish the old form of government. These cities are undoubtedly getting better returns for their expenditures than formerly; their laws are better enforced; and there has been in them a great awakening of civic interest. A complete verdict cannot yet be rendered on every case, but if one must be given on the general situation in the South it will be "so far, so good."